In Memoriam: Dwight L. Bolinger 1907-1992

By Arthur J. Bronstein

Dwight Bolinger, longtime member of ADS, pro-
lific contributor to the study of linguistics and of the
Spanish and English languages, died in Palo Alto on
February 23. His passing leaves a space that will not
easily be filled, as all of us in this society know.

Bolinger’s publishing and professional career was
remarkable. He made a real impact on the discipline
of linguistics and strongly influenced many of its
practitioners. He authored or edited 15 books and
approximately 300 essays in published journals and
collections.

One cannot even think of such subjects as intona-
tion, pitch accent, phrasal verbs, the double vowel
triangle of American English, truth in linguistics,
contrastive stress, linear modification, Modern Span-
ish, melodic levels and configurations, idiomaticity—and so much more—without referring
to his contributions.

Bolinger fell into no special group or school of
linguistics. He could, and did, take issue with adher-
ents of structuralism as easily as he did with trans-
formationalists. His interests lay in the observa-
tion, recording, and analysis of data: what people
said, meant, pronounced, used; how they extended
the lexicon; why certain expressions could be ana-
lyzed as grammatical, or not; how we use language
on the street, over the radio or TV; why we mean
what we say, and so much more.

Like the composer of music that he thought he
might become (when still an undergraduate), he
stated that he “tried to test the limits of language with
a kaleidoscope of examples.” (Cf. his autobiogra-
phical essay in First Person Singular II, ed. Konrad
Koerner, Benjamins 1991.)

KANSAS CITY, HARVARD, PALO ALTO

Bolinger’s professional career started in 1937 at
Kansas City (Missouri) Junior College; he moved to
Washburn College for six years, then to the Univer-
sity of Southern California in 1944 for 13 years
(where he chaired the Department of Spanish), to the
University of Colorado in 1960, and then to Harvard
(1963 to 1972). He became emeritus in 1973, “retir-
ing” to Palo Alto, where he joined Stanford Univer-
sity as a visiting scholar in linguistics.

He was a Sterling Fellow at Yale in 1943, a Re-
search Fellow at the Haskins Laboratories in 1951.
and at the Center for Advanced Studies in the Behav-
ioral Sciences at Stanford in 1969.

He served as president of the American Associa-
tion of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese (1960),
of the Linguistic Society of America (1972), and of
the Linguistic Association of Canada and the United
States (1975-76).

His published essays appeared in Language,
PMLA, American Speech, PADS, Word, Journal of
Linguistics, Journal of Broadcasting, Language and
Communication, Journal of English Linguistics,
American Scholar, Modern Language Journal, In-
ternational Journal of Lexicography, and many oth-
ers. He started “Among the New Words” for Ameri-
can Speech—the enterprise that traces itself to the
current keepers of neologisms for that journal, John
and Adele Algeo.

THE COMPLETE CORRESPONDENT

Bolinger seems to have corresponded with every
major linguist in the country. His files of letters, so
carefully arranged in his study at his home in Palo
Alto, began with letters to and from H.L. Mencken in
1936. His correspondence didn’t come to a halt until
his recent illness began to force a slowing down.

I still react with wonder that anyone could have
written and received thousands of letters to and from
so many major linguists, on matters of scholarly
import about everything that Bolinger had an interest
in. He could, and did, refer to those letters and files
with the ease of removing a volume from the large
collection of linguistic materials that surrounded
him.

His First Person essay provides a chance to note
his remarks about so many linguists of the century,
with pert comments such as “no-nonsense R.
Stockwell”; Y. Malkiel “with more mileage as a
writer of linguistics than anyone else”; R. Jakobson
“whose conversation and wit never dulled even by
the Russian syntax and phonology that it had to filter
through”; N. Chomsky, “the most skilled advocate in
our field who would write an equation any day rather
than a paragraph,” and more.

(Please turn to the next page)
LAVIS II: Call for Papers

Proposals are now invited for presentations at the conference on Language Variety in the South to be held at Auburn University April 1-4, 1993.

LAVIS II is its acronym, and it promises indeed to be lavish, too, with addresses by distinguished scholars from North America and Europe as well as "lots of food and fun," in the words of the organizing committee.

November 15 is the deadline for abstracts of 20-minute papers treating any aspect of Southern American English: lexical, phonological, morphological, syntactic, or discourse features; regional or social varieties and their origins; effects of language contact; methods of data collection and analysis.

Address abstracts or inquiries to Cynthia Bernstein, Thomas Nunnally, or Robin Sabino, LAVIS II Committee, Dept. of English, Auburn University, Auburn University [sic] AL 36849-5203; phone (205) 844-4620; fax (205) 844-2378.

The conference will be held in conjunction with the spring meeting of the Southeast Conference on Linguistics. SECOL abstracts not directly concerned with Southern American English should be sent to Greta Little and Michael Montgomery, Linguistics Program, University of South Carolina, Columbia SC 29208.

Like the original LAVIS, held in 1981 at the University of South Carolina, LAVIS II is expected to result in a published volume of essays.

Nominations Still Welcome

In September the Nominating Committee will propose candidates for Vice President 1993-94, Executive Council member 1993-96, and Nominating Committee member 1993-94. Before then your suggestions are still welcome. Write to Nominating Committee Chair Richard W. Bailey, Dept. of English Language and Literature, Univ. of Michigan, Ann Arbor MI 48109. Other committee members are Thomas J. Creswell and Amy Devitt.

In the fall President Michael Linn will name three students as Presidential Honorary Members. Your nominations are still welcome; write him at English Dept., 420 Humanities Bldg., Univ. of Minnesota, Duluth MN 55812.